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ABSTRACT

The proposal for a study of success factors for overseas business interns is presented. The proposed research would investigate predictors of success for undergraduate and graduate international trade majors from the United States and Western Europe who are interning in foreign countries. Predictors to be considered include personal characteristics such as language skills, values, personality, and perceptions about the new environment, and internship job characteristics such as job challenge, support, and the functional experience developed. Dependent measures include: (1) intern performance as rated by the intern, supervising professor, and business supervisor; (2) intern satisfaction with the experience, and (3) intern commitment to a future international career. Methodological problems are also discussed. (Author/MSE)

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE PREDICTORS OF SUCCESS OF EXPATRIATE STUDENT INTERNS

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"An Examination of the Predictors of Success of Expatriate Student Interns"

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a proposal for research that is currently in progress. The purpose of this research is to examine predictors of success of individuals who serve as business interns in a country foreign to them. Subjects are either in a bachelors or masters program in International Trade from the United States or Western Europe. The predictors to be considered are related to personal characteristics of the students such as language skills, values, personality, perceptions of the new environment as well as characteristics of the internship job. Dependent measures will be performance of the intern (ratings of self, supervising professor, and business supervisor), satisfaction of the intern with the experience, and intern commitment to a future international career. Methodological problems will also be presented.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine variables that predict success for International Trade majors who serve an internship abroad. Am empirical examination of such an issue merits study because:

1) The literature on predictors of effective behavior in a business environment abroad is mostly anecdotal. In 1978, Newman, Bhatt, and Gutteridge labeled the area "a theoretical and empirical vacuum." At this point in time, there is mostly anecdotal evidence about what is being done to prepare individuals for overseas assignments as well as perceptions of organizations related to why individuals succeed or fail. However, individual characteristics, the job itself, and the environment as contributing to success or failure have not been examined empirically.

2) International Trade has become increasingly important for the United States because of the escalating trade deficit and increasing involvement of American businesses in other nations. Some statistics that illustrate this phenomenal growth are:

	1960	1980
-exports as a percentage of Gross National Product	4.8%	9.6%
	1957	1974
-foreign share of earnings in all industries	8.7%	26.9%

-the number of foreign subsidiaries doubled from 1950 to 1960 and doubled again from 1961 to 1975 (Kobrin, 1984).

3) Since international trade has become increasingly important to the United States' business health, the educational implications of preparing students to function in a changed global economy are important to examine. It may not be true that such students will work abroad since the number of expatriate Americans has declined in the last ten years (Kobrin, 1984). However, the demand on individuals in business to coordinate globally has increased and likely will continue to do so. We need as educators to understand what preparation and characteristics individuals need to succeed in coping with business environments that may be different from the native environment in multiple tangible and intangible ways.

The question becomes then how best to prepare students for such job demands. Interestingly, a survey of organizations involved extensively in international trade disclosed that education was rarely, if ever, mentioned as a means of acquiring international expertise (Kobrin, 1984). Actual experience abroad (living or extensive travel) was considered the most important learning tool. Education, however, has been considered a competitive tool that may compensate for

the United States' narrowing technological advantage (Kobrin, 1984). This is only possible if we can understand how to use education to help students succeed. The internship in International Trade offers a unique opportunity; it builds on academic preparation for another culture and it adds a component of actual job experience that organizations value. The internship experience focuses on bridging the gap from theoretical knowledge to application by providing actual experience (Wolf, 1979). Such a combination of efforts should provide significant clues regarding what factors facilitate the acquisition of international expertise.

4) One particularly intriguing factor in the business literature regarding American expatriate managers is the fact that only 3% are female (Adler, 1984). However, female student representation in the International Trade program is nearly equivalent to males. This study can be used to examine male and female differences, if any, in predicting success cross-culturally.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The best source of information on current practices in preparing individuals for international work is the business literature. Most of the literature is based on descriptive/case studies of what one organization has done or surveys of organizations. Few organizations apparently will deny the extent of international differences regarding language, politics, religion, social customs and norms, although many argue that "business is business" and no special attention to such differences is necessary (Kobrin, 1984).

It is the philosophical approach of this study that this simply is not the case. The literature abounds with at least anecdotal evidence of the faux pas and errors of judgment that have been generated because of a lack of knowledge of the language, customs, and beliefs of other nationalities. It has also been suggested that some characteristics valued by American business may be harmful when demonstrated in other cultures. For example, aggressiveness may be perceived as rudeness and inappropriate behavior in cultures that value patience, courtesy, and the development of interpersonal relationships in business. The least significant result of the above may be a short-term loss of profit; what is most serious for American business is the continuing lack of adaptability, or even worse, an insensitivity regarding the need to adapt. Such an unbroken cycle does not bode well for increases in doing business abroad effectively.

One suggestion related to the cause of myopia of Americans in doing business abroad is that the United States was an isolationist for such a long historical period that it was never subjected to the necessity of coping with one's near yet different neighbors as in Western Europe (Graham and Herberger, 1983). Whatever the cause(s), there seems to be evidence that organizations in the United States perceive preparation for the experience abroad differently than other countries, and one of the consequences is a higher failure rate of American expatriates. This is generally measured by returning home before the assignment is completed because of job failure and/or individual or family dissatisfaction.

Tung (1982) surveyed businesses in the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. Some of the results were:

	% Who Reported Existence of Training as Preparation for Overseas Assignment	Estimated Failure Rate of Expatriates
United States	32%	69% of sample estimated 10-20%
Western Europe	69%	59% of sample estimated less than 5%
Japan	57%	76% of sample estimated less than 5%

It was concluded that use of rigorous training reduced incidents of inability to function. Incidentally, failure in the United States was repeatedly suggested to relate to problems with adaptation, especially regarding the family. This suggests

inadequate preparation and faulty expectations regarding aspects of expatriate living that do not relate directly to the job.

The reasons for a lack of attention to selection and training may also relate to perceptions regarding the importance of cultural preparation. A recent survey of 1000 large United States' firms found the following (Baliga & Baker, 1985):

*While 50% of firms believe foreign language skill is important, only 20% of the firms require such skill for overseas assignments.

*25% of the firms offered pre-departure training in house which ranged from one to five days. Most training focused on company operations and very little was included on political, historical, economic, or cultural factors of the host country.

The previously cited survey by Kobrin (1984) found that while 10% of organizations felt international expertise was critical for an international assignment, 45% felt it was important, 39% felt "it was nice to have", but a minor factor, and 6% felt it was unimportant.

In conclusion, it seems that the emphasis on expatriate effectiveness and preparation is related mostly to the job itself and much less to language and cultural factors. There is little or no empirical research to suggest whether this is a viable approach. Certainly it appears that other countries are more concerned about the cultural elements in selection and preparation of the expatriate.

THEORETICAL MODEL

The prevailing theoretical model for this study is role theory. Bandura (1977) suggested that individuals learn through a combination of observation, practice, and reinforcement for appropriate behavior. One important source of difficulty in learning the role, besides lacking the opportunity to learn and practice as mentioned, is the experience of conflict (Brown, 1983). It is the premise of the study that the characteristics of the individual, the internship, and the environment may either hinder or help the learning of role in another culture. It is impossible, in this context, to explain all the hypotheses associated with variables listed for the study in Appendix A. However, a few examples will be discussed briefly.

Conflict is a particularly relevant issue in this study since it is likely the intern will experience conflict in two ways. First, the attempt to interface between two cultures may produce conflict. Role expectations of the self and others may clash because of differential cultural perceptions of appropriate behavior. Skills and personality traits that the intern possesses may ease the conflict, and thus increase the interface. For example, language skills and values could be particularly important. Without a language skill, one cannot permeate a culture. An individual is dependent upon others for information and is isolated from feedback, support, and communication with others in the environment (Kobrin, 1984). As language skill

increases, it is hypothesized that the likelihood of successful interface will also increase.

Similar values of the intern in comparison to the host country may also facilitate adaptation. Even if values are not similar, it appears that high levels of self-esteem and flexibility may increase the likelihood of tolerance and understanding. One study suggests that personal values may be revised as a result of the international experience and may move closer to values associated with the host's country (Lee & Larwood, 1983). There is normative information available from an extensive study of national values with a standardized instrument that will aid significantly in the examination of this factor (Hofstede, 1984).

The second source of conflict relates to the internship as a first career position. The individual is experiencing a socialization process regarding the professional role. Factors that should lessen this conflict are those related to learning functional skills. For example, a challenging job and supervisory support should decrease the conflict and increase the learning (Wanous, 1980).

In summary, this study will examine the relationship between variables the literature suggests will be facilitative of adaptation to another culture and job success and satisfaction of the intern.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects will be undergraduate and graduate students who serve an internship abroad from International Trade programs both from Eastern Michigan University as well as European students who serve an internship in the United States. The universe of possible subjects is small and the statistical tests should have large N's (100 is a reasonable goal) in order to ensure the appropriate use of desirable statistical tests (e.g., MANOVA, factor analysis). Therefore, in order to increase the sample size, personal calls will be made to students to request their participation before mailing surveys. If the size of sample generated should be 50 or less the statistics must be limited to descriptive statistics such as chi squares and correlations.

Measurements The independent variables listed in Appendix A were generated by a search of the literature and in most cases, use standardized questionnaires with adequate levels of validity and reliability. Dependent variables (measures of performance and satisfaction) will be assessed by two to three items each regarding various dimensions, for example, performance ratings by the company, the internship professor who supervises, and the student will all be used to ensure adequate measurement.

IMPLICATIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The information generated from this study will have both educational and business implications. First, for education, there will be information available about what educational and internship experiences are most predictive of successful internship performance and intern satisfaction. This feedback may initiate curriculum revisions and an increase in the monitoring of internships to ensure that the student receives an adequate internship experience. The experience, since it is a first career job, may make a significant difference in launching future successful careers for students.

The business implications may also yield important information that should be disseminated not only in an academic publication mode, but also in publications that businesses use. This data may support (given support for hypotheses, of course) an empirical increase in expatriate effectiveness with demonstrated language skills and cultural preparation. This will contradict commonly held business beliefs that functional preparation for international work is the most salient factor in predicting success. The implication relates to increased levels of training for such positions.

In conclusion, it is believed that the research described should contribute to a knowledge base in both education and business as well as suggesting revisions to current practices.

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Predictors of Student Success on Internship	Measured by	Dependent Measures of Student Success on Internship	Measured by
Characteristics of Student			
1 -Demographics: sex, race, age, marital status, native country	1 -Student questionnaire	-Performance of intern (self, professors, and supervisor in organization rating)	-2 item Likert scale on questionnaires of quality and quantity of performance and same items to professor and supervisor
2 -Expertise with language of host country	2 -GPA in language courses		
3 -Functional knowledge of job	3 -Student questionnaire		
4 -Value system or needs (Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism, Masculinity)	4 -Value Survey Module (Hofstede)		
5 -Self-esteem	5 -Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg)		
6 -Flexibility/adaptability	6 -Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale (Budner)		
7 -Locus of control (internal/ external)	7 -Internal/External Scale (Rotter)		
Characteristics of Internship			
1 -Challenge, feedback within job	1 -Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman)	-Satisfaction of intern with internship re job itself and supervisor	-Job Descriptive Inventory (Smith, Kendall & Hulin)
2 -Supervisory support	2 -Job Descriptive Inventory (Smith, Kendall, Hulin)		
3 -Functional experience developed	3 -Student questionnaire		
Student Perceptions of Environment of Internship			
1 -Previous experience with host country (e.g., traveling, living, friends)	1+2 -Student questionnaire (Likert scale on exposure)	-Commitment to future international career	-Intentions for future as expressed on questionnaire
2 -Cultural knowledge (politics, economics, social, etc.)	3 -Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale (Budner)	-Satisfaction of student with cultural experience	
3 -Nature of environment (benign or threatening-isolation, danger, prejudice)			